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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 001277

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS, PRM/RMACKLER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: GON CANCELS DALAI LAMA CELEBRATIONS

REF: 02 KATHMANDU 1332

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. ON JULY 4, THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL (GON) PROHIBITED TIBETAN GROUPS FROM HOLDING CELEBRATIONS ON JULY 6 TO HONOR THE DALAI LAMA'S BIRTHDAY. DESPITE THE PROHIBITION, AT LEAST TWO TIBETAN GROUPS PROCEEDED WITH CELEBRATIONS WITHOUT GON INTERFERENCE. ALTHOUGH THE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS ARE NECESSARILY POLITICAL AS WELL AS RELIGIOUS, THIS INCIDENT APPEARS TO SIGNAL A FURTHER TIGHTENING OF RESTRICTIONS ON TIBETAN ACTIVITIES IN NEPAL. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) ON JUNE 19, THE OFFICE OF TIBET FORMALLY APPLIED FOR PERMISSION TO HOLD BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS, INCLUDING A CULTURAL SHOW AT A TIBETAN BOARDING SCHOOL AND AN EVENING RECEPTION FOR DIGNITARIES AND FOREIGN DIPLOMATS AT A MAJOR HOTEL. ON JUNE 26, WANGCHUK TSERING, THE DALAI LAMA'S REPRESENTATIVE IN NEPAL, RECEIVED PERMISSION FROM KATHMANDU'S CHIEF DISTRICT OFFICER (CDO) TO HOLD THE CELEBRATIONS.

3. (SBU) HOWEVER, ON JULY 4, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE FOR CENTRAL KATHMANDU TOLD TSERING THAT, ON THE ORDER OF THE HOME MINISTRY, THE OFFICE OF TIBET WOULD HAVE TO CANCEL ALL CELEBRATIONS HELD IN HONOR OF THE DALAI LAMA'S BIRTHDAY, EVEN THOSE TO BE HELD INSIDE THE TEMPLE AT BOUDDHANATH STUPA AND SURROUNDING MONASTERIES. [NOTE. THE BOUDDHANATH STUPA IS CONSIDERED THE HOLIEST TEMPLE FOR TIBETAN BUDDHISTS IN NEPAL. END NOTE.] ACCORDING TO TSERING, THE SUPERINTENDENT SAID THAT CELEBRATIONS COULD

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ONLY BE HELD "IN THE PRIVACY OF YOUR OWN HOMES." DESPITE REPEATED EFFORTS TO CONTACT OTHER GON OFFICIALS, THE OFFICE OF TIBET AND OTHER TIBETAN COMMUNITY LEADERS MADE REPEATED BUT UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO PERSUADE GON OFFICIALS TO GRANT THEM PERMISSION TO HOLD THE CELEBRATIONS.

4. (SBU) DESPITE THE PROHIBITION, AT LEAST TWO TIBETAN GROUPS HELD CELEBRATIONS ON JULY 6. A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 300 BUDDHIST NEPALI CITIZENS GATHERED AT THE BOUDDHANATH STUPA TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTHDAY. ALSO, THE HIMALAYAN BUDDHIST SOCIETY PROCEEDED WITH ITS CELEBRATION AT A MONASTERY NEAR BOUDDHA, NORTHEAST OF KATHMANDU, WHICH BETWEEN 300-400 PEOPLE ATTENDED. THESE CELEBRATIONS WERE CONDUCTED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE BY THE GON.

5. (SBU) COMMENT. WITHOUT A DOUBT, THE CANCELLATION OF TIBETAN CELEBRATIONS FOR THE DALAI LAMA'S BIRTHDAY AGAIN THIS YEAR REPRESENTS A FURTHER TIGHTENING OF TIBETAN CULTURAL EXPRESSION IN NEPAL. THIS YEAR, UNLIKE LAST YEAR, THE OFFICE OF TIBET FORMALLY REQUESTED, AND RECEIVED, PERMISSION FROM THE GON TO HOLD ITS CELEBRATIONS, ALTHOUGH IT WAS LATER RESCINDED. ALSO UNLIKE LAST YEAR, THE TIBETANS WERE SPECIFICALLY PROHIBITED FROM HOLDING CEREMONIES WITHIN TEMPLES AND MONASTERIES. THE DALAI LAMA'S DUAL ROLE NOT ONLY AS RELIGIOUS FIGURE BUT ALSO AS HEAD OF THE TIBETAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE POSES A SERIOUS DILEMMA FOR THE GON. OFFICIALS AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TELL US THAT THEY HAVE NO DESIRE TO CURTAIL TIBETAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES, BUT THE TIBETAN THEOCRACY IN EXILE MEANS THAT VIRTUALLY EVERY EVENT ORGANIZED BY THE DALAI LAMA'S OFFICE IN NEPAL IS INVESTED WITH NATIONALISTIC AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE, WHICH COMPLICATES NEPAL'S RELATIONS WITH CHINA. END COMMENT.

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